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## THEN AND NOW—A CONTRAST

BY MARY M. RIDDLE, R.N.

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THE evolution of nursing, or the progress made by the nursing profession during the last thirty-five years, is most marked when one considers conditions as they existed in the days so long ago and compares them with the present time. Any nurse belonging to the earlier period who saw the moving picture entitled "In the Footsteps of Florence Nightingale" must have been impressed with



Type of uniform worn at the time referred to in this article. The oil lamp was the only night light. Caps were sometimes set on fire. The photograph was taken of Mary L. Keith in 1886.

the fact that the depicted arrival of the young woman presenting herself to the nurse school of the modern hospital was almost all that seemed typical of her own experience, even though the young woman of the picture, with her businesslike appearance and air of assurance, presented some contrasts to the more timid, but more mature woman entering upon her nursing career in the late eighties or early nineties.

She may have recalled her own arrival and how she was shown into a cosy reception room in the very comfortable nurses' home and heard the announcement made through the telephone, "The new

probationer has come." The announcement gave the new arrival a pang and fixed within her a purpose always and forever to avoid, if possible, the use of the title she had just heard applied to herself. She was, however, reassured by the sight of the sweet-faced superintendent of nurses who appeared almost immediately to welcome the newcomer, inquire concerning her journey, her need of refreshment, to show her to her room, ascertain its fitness for occupancy, and introduce her to a student nurse taking her hour off in a near-by room. All this gave to the young woman a sense of safety and security. But she was the only arrival for three weeks; there was no big class coming in with her, as there would be today, no one with whom she could affiliate or compare notes. She had to bear the brunt of the newness alone.

The next morning she was assigned to her place in the ward, where she was expected to do her share of the work without witnessing any demonstration of it as it would be given today.

"Can't you make that bed look better?" fell upon her ears like a knell, said bed being occupied by a man with a fractured femur which was protected from the bed clothing by a cradle.

"Now take your basin and dust the south side of the ward!" How to dust with a basin, when she had been accustomed to using a cloth, and which was the south side of the ward, were two difficult questions for her to decide, but the timely explanation of one of the men patients made it possible for her to proceed with some degree of success. Her home training required such dusting that no fleck of dust could be discovered immediately afterward. Naturally, she aspired to have the same results in her first hospital dusting—wiping off every part of the bed frame, chairs, etc., and every slat of the inside blinds, when a near-by patient said, "Oh, come on, you'll soon have to get over that!" But she pressed on in the same way until told by the head nurse to "Hurry up" and get the ordered fomentation on Number 15's chest. Fortunately she could locate the man's chest, but what and where was the fomentation? Ashamed of her ignorance and unwilling to be instructed by a patient so soon again, she wandered to the diet kitchen, where the ward maid noticed her distress and inquired into it. Upon being told of her dilemma the maid said: "Sure, we can do that; be after gettin' your fomentation flannel from the box behind the door in the linen closet and bring it here and I'll show ye."

She was as good as her word and no fomentation ever looked better to that young woman, either as probationer or as graduate nurse, though some must have been better.

The new probationer's first half day was soon passed and on her

way to the dining room at noon she concluded that the training might be excellent, but evidently the school's instructors were absent, and she wondered if there were any electives. Yet that hospital and its nurse school was one of the best in the land and the hospital ward was so well conducted that it remains to this day a shining example in the mind of the then probationer.

Compare this procedure with that of the present day, when the probation class members on the first day after admission are assembled, are carefully taught from day to day, first the simpler work, which is gradually increased and developed until the young women become acquainted with the routine work, as well as with much that is more complex, and are adjudged sufficiently expert to work under supervision in the wards and go on gaining in knowledge and experience until the time when they no longer require the close supervision and are declared fit for graduation.

Since such a hard physical strain was put upon the young nurse, she required great physical strength and endurance, and the training schools were compelled to admit only the able-bodied to their classes, throwing into discard all who were under weight or undersized; surely there must have been much good nursing material, even genius, lost to the sick world.

Routine work went on in the wards, each day being spent much as was the probationer's first half day. Night duty followed in course of time and consisted of eleven hours of service for a period of two months. As much consideration as possible was shown the night nurses and they were not allowed a second term of night duty without an intervening vacation and were given five months of it during the course of two years.

The allotted time for rest and recreation during the day was one hour, which every student nurse was obliged to take; nothing short of a fire in the hospital, or the nurse's own inability to get off duty, would excuse her to the authorities for not doing so. It was as much of a misdemeanor for her to be on duty when she should be off, as it was to fail to be on duty at the appointed time.

Unlike many schools at that time, the particular school in which this probationer found herself gave much thought to the arrangement of the nurses' vacations. Students were given, as nearly as possible, their choice of time and they were always given sufficient notice to make suitable arrangements for spending it.

In common with those of other schools of the time, the nurses were retarded in their progress by the prevailing custom of keeping them too long in those wards, or at those posts, where their most excellent service was given, thereby preventing the rounded experience

and usefulness of the course of instruction to which they were entitled and making the hospital the only gainer.

If the instruction given in the wards was meagre and would better be called experience, class-room instruction was likewise limited, there being but one class recitation and one lecture per week for each nurse. They were, however, always attended, no work nor ward emergency furnished adequate excuse for absence from class, but were provided for in some other way. No other time for rest or recreation was given on class or lecture days.

Nurses' food in those days was provided in a more or less routine manner, but was ample, though simple. Nowhere could better staple articles of food have been found, either then or now. The chief complaint heard was that the exact menu was always known, each day in the week had its own, and it never varied. It was exceedingly tiresome to have one's Tuesday dinner always the same, or to know that Friday's dessert would be a square piece of apple pie. If it could occasionally have been oblong or triangular, or such a piece as would naturally be cut from a round pie, it might have been not only endured but enjoyed. When the mother of one of the nurses inquired regarding her preferences in food during an approaching vacation she was told that anything except stewed prunes and square pie would be appreciated.

There was very little attention paid to any social activities for the nurses. The Christmas season always brought a party, but the pupils were so unused to meeting each other in a truly social way that they hardly knew what was expected of them nor how to conduct themselves, and while they might have preferred to absent themselves, their loyalty and class spirit would not permit them to do so. The St. Barnabas Guild did much in drawing the nurses together and for this alone would have had their gratitude, even though the principles for which the Guild stands have always been appreciated. It was certainly a great event to attend a meeting of the Guild and remain for refreshments and a social hour, the latter possibly ending in a dance, and the refreshments being the much loved ice cream and cake.

Graduation was not celebrated as such. When a nurse had passed her examinations and had completed her time she was called to the office of the superintendent of nurses and handed her diploma. She doubtless heard a few words of appreciation from her superintendent and she was then allowed to go her own way. At that time there were no alumnae associations or other organizations for her to join. She was therefore very decidedly dependent wholly upon herself. Opportunities in the field of nursing were not many and

she had little from which to choose. Most of the large cities had district or visiting nursing organizations, but the average nurse knew nothing about them at the time of her graduation. Industrial nursing, Red Cross work for nurses, etc., had not come into existence. The only occupation open to her was private duty nursing and, as the demand was not quite equal to the supply in this line of work, she took a room near the hospital and prepared to await her turn for a call to a case. There was little special nursing done in the hospital and she could not, therefore, hope for any work from that source.

She was wholly dependent upon the nurses' registry connected with the medical library of the city, there being no registries conducted by nurses. The registry was autocratic and had no particular interest in the nurse, outside of the fee she paid for membership in the registry and the fee she was supposed to collect from her patient and return to the registry for sending her upon the case.

This system was always more or less obnoxious to the nurses in general and finally they broke away from the registry in the medical library, completed an organization of their own to maintain one, and have been free ever since. It was a great step for the nurses to take and it could not be taken without due regard for the possible consequences. So dependent had they been, so untried was the new organization, and so threatening was the old, it was finally decided that at the beginning none of the new organization's officers should be private duty nurses, but must be those in institutional and other positions who had nothing to lose and therefore could survive a boycott if one came.

The new organization proved a success, there could be no boycott and the incident has proved one of the very best arguments for organization. Incidentally it might be said that the Medical Library Association which maintained the registry was able to build a fine new home for its library largely through the efforts of the nurses in collecting fees.

While the course of study and general educational development of nurses through their schools of nursing were limited, thirty-five or forty years ago, it must not be concluded that the nursing care of the sick was likewise limited. Through the large amount of practical work the nurses acquired great deftness of hand, while the opportunities for observation and the cultivation of a sound discriminating judgment resulted in a knowledge of the condition of patients not always enjoyed by those of the present day. The patient was the unit of consideration in all hospital schools, and this principle formed the chief topic in all the instruction on ethics.

The superintendents and directors of the schools were most

exemplary in their devotion to duty as they understood it. Their routine work was quite as absorbing as that of their students and they had neither time nor strength to originate new methods or new courses for their students. Their devotion and unselfishness were a constant inspiration to their nurses which in many instances continues to this day.

They finally broke away from traditions to form nursing organizations, which marked the dawn of a new progress whose light has continued to shine steadily, showing the way, until today schools for nurses are what they are, and all nurses may be excused for having pride in them, at the same time that they are impelled to respect the past and have faith in the future.

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## OUR JUNIOR COLLEGE PLAYLET

BY DIXIE L. DAVIS

*Kansas City, Missouri*

**D**EAR Erstwhile Probationers Everywhere: The members of the Probation and Junior classes (why not "Freshmen" instead of Probationers, I wonder?) from all the hospitals in Kansas City, Missouri, have just completed a most delightful and highly instructive term at Junior College, Kansas City, and it has occurred to me that others who have just set forth on their journey toward the coveted R.N. might be interested in our preliminary steps.

The courses at Junior College consisted of theoretical and practical work in Anatomy, Chemistry, Bacteriology, Drugs and Solutions, Dietetics, History of Nursing and Practical Nursing. But it is of our "playlet" or demonstration in Practical Nursing given in the auditorium at Junior College that I want to tell you. Heretofore, the supervisors of the various hospitals have watched us, as individuals, give temperature sponges, make beds with box corners, etc. This year we wanted something different, so at our instructor's suggestion we gave a little play outlining a day in the hospital; each hospital was to have 15 minutes and each group of nurses to wear their own uniform.

Mercy Hospital and Christian Church Hospital opened: voices were heard at morning prayer, then the Head Nurse appeared and listened to the night report and assigned daily duties. Four nurses took the part of patients,—one a "mental" patient who was constantly interrupting the routine; one as a pre-operative, scared (not wholly simulated) and failing to see the necessity for the administration of